



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCE RESEARCH, IDEAS AND INNOVATIONS IN TECHNOLOGY

ISSN: 2454-132X

Impact Factor: 6.078

(Volume 8, Issue 3 - V8I3-1294)

Available online at: <https://www.ijariit.com>

Women workers in construction sector of Kerala –An insight into their economic condition

Dr. T. Shameerdas

tshameerdas@gmail.com

Government College, Madappally, Kerala

ABSTRACT

The economic development of a country depends on the growth of Industry and technological development. Transition from agriculture oriented economy to industry based seems to be a major landmark. Building construction is a concomitant factor of industrial development. Construction activities create larger employment opportunities to considerable number of workers. The construction workers are mainly working in informal or unorganized sectors. Basic problems faced in this field include, disparity in wage, health issues, discrimination and economic problems etc. The main objective of the study is to analyze the economic and social conditions of women working in the construction sector. The study reveals the weaker economic conditions of women construction workers. Lack of fixed income and varying working hours continues to haunt them. Their income is found insufficient for their subsistence. The study also revealed that out of the sampled women construction workers most of them depend on loans for meeting their needs of existence. They are not getting work for all days of month and hence occupational safety is found to be lacking.

Keywords: *Wages, Economic Problems*

1. INTRODUCTION

The constitution of India guarantees equality of opportunity in employment and directs the state to secure equal rights for livelihood, equal pay for equal work as well as just and human conditions of work for all. A woman along with man from time immemorial has formed an integral part of social structure throughout the world. In Indian society, she has played and continues to play an important role. It is true that the progress of the country can be judged to a great extent by the status of her women. She plays manifold role in the society: as a mother, as a wife and as a sister. Thus she is the foundation stone of the family in particular and the society in general. Women enter the market as wage earners but occupy secondary position in the labour workforce. Their significance is considered as marginal. They enter the labour market only when the economic compulsions force them to supplement the meagre family earnings. This perception of women's work as a supplementary or balancing force in the family and the nation's workforce has made them susceptible to all sorts of discriminating treatment and exploitation.

While women represent 50% of the adult population and one third of labour force, they perform nearly two third of all working hours and receives only one tenth of the world income. Human development report for the year 2010 on the amount of time that women and men spend on market and non-market activities by considering 31 countries reveals that women work longer hours than men in nearly every country. Women carry an average 53% of total burden of work in developing countries and 51% of that in industrial countries. Also roughly two third of women's total work time is spend in unpaid non system of national accounts activities.

Organized sector workers are distinguished by regular salaried jobs with well-defined terms and conditions of employment, clear-cut rights and obligations, and fairly comprehensive social security protection. The unorganized sector on the other hand has no such employer - employee relationships and lacks most forms of social protection. Having no fixed employer, these workers are casual, contractual, migrant, home based, own- account workers who attempt to earn a living from whatever meagre assets and skills they possess.

National Commission on Labour has defined unorganized labour as those who have not been able to organize themselves in pursuit of common objectives on account of constraints like casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy etc. The unorganized sector is characterized by the presence of factors viz. long hours of work, wage discrimination of men and women, lack of job security, no minimum wages, lack of minimum facilities at workplace, ill-treatment, heavy physical work and sexual exploitation.

The prevalence of women workers in urban unorganized sector is significant in number. They are engaged in activities like domestic work, construction work, small trades like bricks making, coir and basket weaving, household industries etc. In rural unorganized sector women are engaged in agricultural activities, animal husbandry, dairy, fisheries etc.

2. CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Construction industry is one of the stable growing industries world over, including India. It is basically a labour-intensive industry. It employs a considerable proportion of population. The construction workers usually belong to poor socioeconomic strata and thus lack the basic amenities. Apart from this, most of the construction projects or sites where these workers are employed are unorganized in nature. Thus, these sites are often not guided by the legislations made for the health and welfare of the workers. Construction workers perform a large variety of duties concerned with building, repairing and wrecking buildings, bridges, dams, roads, railways, and so on. The work may include mixing, pouring and spreading concrete, asphalt, gravel and other materials. Despite the increasing mechanization of construction and the more frequent use of pre-cast concrete sections, contact with wet cement still occurs, particularly in small jobs. The work is hard physical labour, often under difficult conditions, including hot, cold, and wet weather.

Construction activity is an integral part of countries infrastructure and industrial development. It includes hospitals, schools, townships, offices, houses, and other buildings. The construction becomes the basic input for socio-economic development of a country. Construction workers may be broadly classified as skilled and unskilled workers. Most of the workers in this sector are employed on a casual basis. Employment in construction is usually interspersed with periods of unemployment of varying duration, mainly due to fluctuating requirements of labour force in each work site. The nature of work is such that there are no holidays.

Construction sector is a key for the success of the globalization of Indian economy. Construction sector is providing employment to 7 Per cent of total world workforce. Today Indian construction industry employs about 31million people and creates assets worth over Rs.2,00,000 million annually. In India, it is the largest employer of unorganized labour next to agricultural sector.

3. WOMEN WORKERS IN CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Women in construction sector are almost unskilled labourers and they face serious problems related to work, viz. low wage, serious injuries, certain occupational diseases etc. Despite these, construction industry overwhelmingly attracts female workers. Their skills are never upgraded as they are allowed to perform only certain types of work and usually they assist the male work force. Compared to men, women are paid less. The strenuous work and physical hardships in this sector has a severe impact on their health. The disability of women worker's spring mainly from immobility of job caused by various socio-economic factors, the nature and character of employment in this sector although manual to some extent, also requires some special skill for efficient management. Despite the unpredictability, women are attracted to this sector due to the severe absence of alternative employment. Mostly the women workers are classified as contract labour and casual labour. Contract labours are attached to a contractor and they work wherever posted. Casual labours are temporary workers and they cease to be employed after the work. Their wages differ from place to place and since they are unorganized, they have no bargaining capacity for the revision of wage. All this deteriorated the conditions of women workers.

According to the ILO, construction jobs in most countries are undertaken almost exclusively by men. However, in the countries of South Asia women play an important role which consists of performing unskilled tasks for low pay. For example, in India it is estimated that up to 30 per cent of construction workforce are women. They are integrated into the building workforce at the bottom end of the industry, as unskilled workers or head-load carriers.

Sapru and Sushma (1991) points out that the condition of women working in the unorganized sector is more depressing, since they stand at the lowest ebb of the society. Women in the unorganized sector work as construction work, agricultural labourers servant maids, petty traders etc.

4. CONSTRUCTION SECTOR IN KERALA

In Kerala, Construction industry is one of the stable growing industries of the world and construction labour form 7.5% of the world labour force. In India, it is the largest economic activity after agriculture and since it is a labour-intensive industry consist 44% of all urban unorganized workers. This work force comprises 55% of unskilled labour, 27% skilled labour and rest the technical and support staff. The two broad categories of construction works are building and civil engineering. Building applies to works involving structures such as houses, offices, shops, factories and schools. Civil engineering applies to all the other built structures in our environments, including roads, tunnels, canals, dams, railways and docks. Construction workers in both categories are at a greater risk of developing certain health disorders and sickness than workers in many other industries. They are exposed to multiple physical, chemical and biological agents, which make them vulnerable to various health problems that include - injuries, respiratory problems, dermatitis, muscular-skeletal disorders and gastro-intestinal diseases. The work is hard physical labour, often under difficult conditions like adverse weather conditions and the nature of work, hours of work, low pay, and poor living conditions with lack of basic amenities and separation from family, lack of job security and lack of access to occupational health services makes the situation worse. Due to ergonomic issues they are also vulnerable to degenerative disorders. Apart from this, in most of construction projects the workers employed are unorganized in nature and often not guided by the legislations made for the health and welfare

of the workers and hence are not eligible for free or subsidized care.

In India the women workers are mostly migrants from remote villages, often are less educated and not cautious about different preventive measures. Most of them are inter-state migrants and has poor language skills that prevent them from understanding the safety precautions given and to voice their problems. Their health and safety are also neglected and accident and occupational disease statistics are not accurately available. In the era of globalization construction is a fast growing industry and very little research has been done on the occupational health, hazards and psychosocial problems of these workers especially in Asian countries like India. In this context to understand the health problems of construction workers and to compare the morbidities among the two categories (building and civil workers) and advocate public health policy measures, this study was conducted.

Irrespective of these sporadic initiatives by the federal and most state governments, violence against women are increasing at an alarming rate and attained a different dimension such as child (female) abuse, In a male dominated Indian society, women were suppressed and for a long time there was no collective effort to oppose such violence and atrocities against women. In recent past, exposure and education of women are increased and they started fighting back against the atrocities. The role played by nongovernment organizations (NGOs) in creating awareness among women on their rights needs special emphasis. Similarly NGOs played a vital role in mobilizing, organizing and empowering women folks in India to a greater extent. In this background present study is an attempt to study the violence against women construction workers in Kerala. The construction sector is an unorganized sector and mainly provides employment to majority of unskilled workers. The study tries to highlight the problems of women construction workers working in 3 different sites such as government sponsored construction sites, NGO based sites and profit making sites .

Rachael Kumar (1994) examines various factor contributing to falling female work force participation rates in Kerala. One such is the redistribution of population as a result of changing fertility and mortality that effects structure and estimates of work force participation. However in construction male work force is increasing either due to the replacement of female workers or because of construction is suited to male members.

5. SIGNIFICANCES OF THE STUDY

Construction sector is one of the largest employers in the country. Construction activity provides job opportunity to large number of skilled as well as unskilled labour force. The women work force in construction field belonged to the economically and socially disadvantaged group. There was no uniformity in their wage structure and their wage level was very low and not fixed. Majority of the women construction workers are facing lots of problems like absence of social security, low wages, gender discrimination, occupational diseases etc. In this context it is necessary to make an awareness of the socio-economic conditions of women workers in construction filed for identifying their problems and living conditions.

The unorganized sector is most vulnerable, ignored and diverse. The unorganized women workers are living below the minimum accepted standards without adequate shelter. The low earnings of these women cannot meet with their daily needs. They do marry, bear children and get old but under these faces of life they live the same life. They work more than men and they have to play a dual role working both in and outside the home. Women in unorganized sector constitute a sizable number so it is important to study their socio-economic conditions. The present study focused on the socio-economic conditions of women working in the construction sector.

Dr. Vandana Dave (2012) made an attempt to understand the socio-economic condition of women labourers. It was carried out on 350 respondents including women construction workers, agriculture labourers and domestic servants working in the unorganized sector. These results shows that majority of the migrant women, were engaged in the construction sector and were only employed in unskilled and low paying jobs as coolies.

The construction activity is one of the important activities of human need. The economics of this sector indicates that this sector is very useful to urban and rural skilled and unskilled persons. One can do the construction work on minimum skill and at low investment of budget and this can break the vicious circle of poverty.

Ghothskar (2003) points out that the construction work is the product of a combination of historical, economic and social factors and processes, which may change with time and circumstances. It is argued that women are found to be not over represented in construction work due to the flexibilities of work. Much employment in this sector is based on the 'male bread winner' model, which does not give adequate space or freedom to women who also have other domestic responsibilities. The employers to ensure more work for less pay exploits this situation.

6. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study was done by the following objectives

1. To study Economic conditions of women workers in the construction field
2. To study working and living conditions of the women workers
3. Find the problem of women workers in the unorganized sector and also recommend some suggestions to improve their quality of life

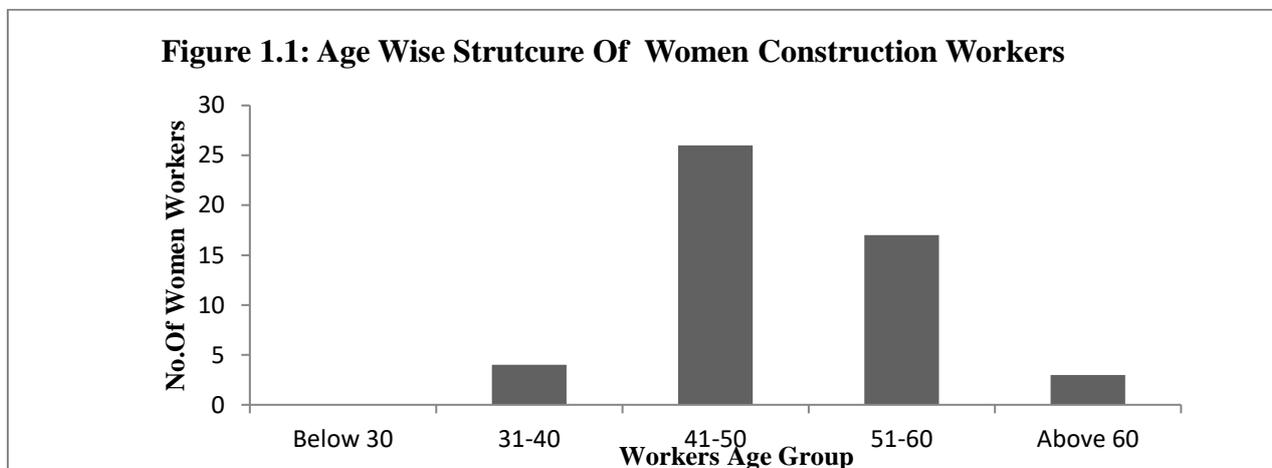
7. OCCUPATION AND STATUS OF INFORMAL CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

There are numerous occupations within the informal construction industry, ranging from unskilled labourers to highly-skilled craft workers. Typically, they form a hierarchy, with gang leaders having the highest status. Notably, women informal construction workers are concentrated almost exclusively at the bottom of the hierarchy. Migrant workers often have opportunity to gain new skills and capital to rise up the hierarchy on return to their states or districts of origin, often becoming gang leaders themselves.

Expanding and fast growing construction sector and, in general, shortage of greater employment opportunity elsewhere has attracted large number of workers in this sector. There are more than 20 million of construction workers in India at present. City, like Indore alone has around more than 10-12 thousand of them. Migration from different states to other states in India and also from rural to urban areas has now become so common that its impact on every aspect of life. Migration become a way of life to many, who are unskilled and semi skilled and find difficult to get better jobs within their natives and locality. Construction labours are labours, who are migrated from different regions and states leaving their native villages in search of daily job. These people in general are nomadic in their life and usually do not returns to their birth place. They travel from one area of work to other area along with their families and live in a place, which is either provided by the owner or temporary shelters prepared by labours. They have maximum mobility because of the nature of their work. These labourers are engaged in huge industrial constructions, residential flat constructions, road constructions, city beautification works. These construction labourers, as a part of unorganized work force remain the most exploited one seven after six decades of independence. Most of the construction labourers migrate to cities and metros are from poor families and are illiterate. Their lack of education and skill make their choice very limited. When they come to big cities, they have to face number of problems because of their inexperience and lack of skill. They become easy victim of exploitation and have to work for their day to day subsistence.

7.1 -Age wise structure of women construction workers

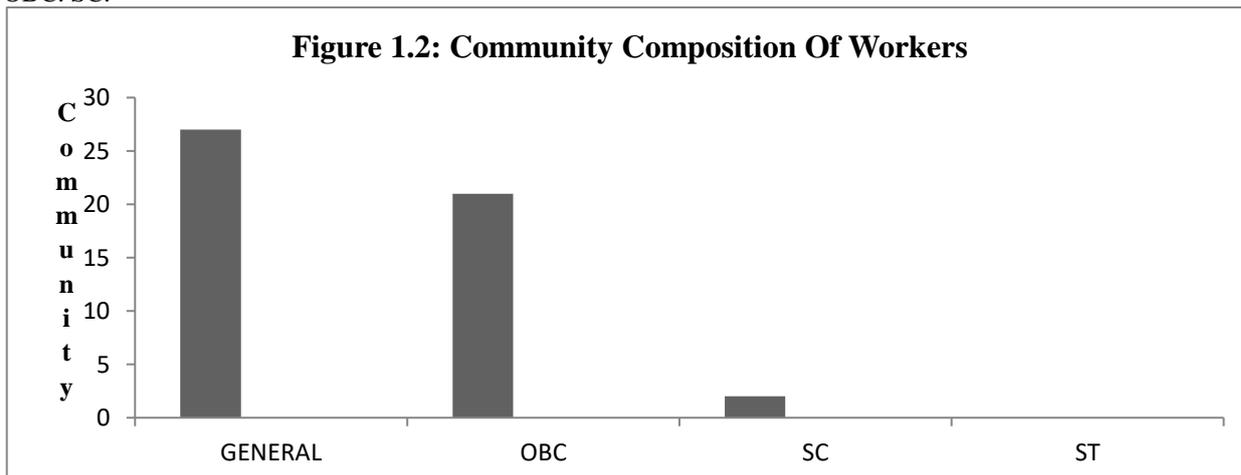
Construction work is painful in nature which requires hard labour and physical strength in which age plays an important role and age is considered as an important factor which determines social condition of women workers. The Figure 1.1 depicts the age group of women construction workers. The highest portion of women construction workers is in the age group of 41-60. The proportion of women construction workers in the age group of 41-50 and 51-60 recorded 52 Per cent and 34 Per cent respectively. While only 8 Per cent construction workers were age group of 31-40 and only 6 Per cent were above 60 years age. It indicates that women workers of the construction sector are in the productive age group.



Source : Primary Data

7.2 Community Composition of Workers

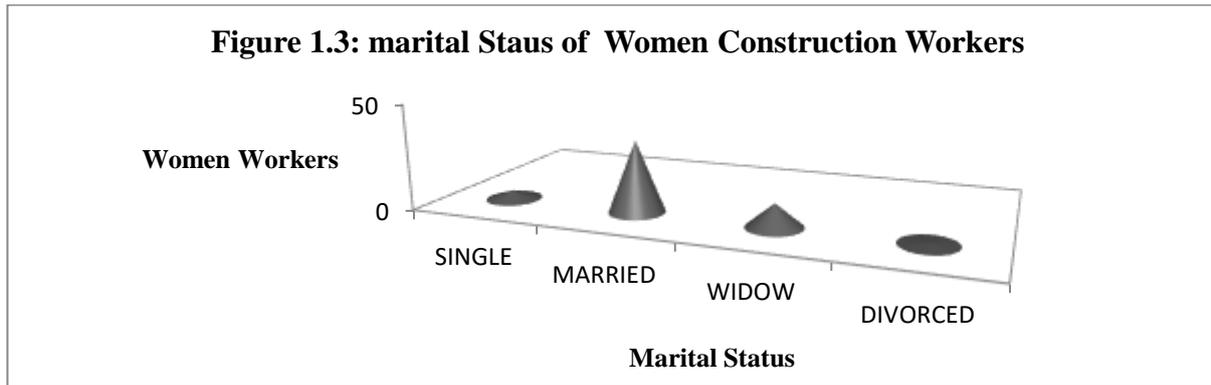
The women construction workers are classified according to their religion and caste in Figure.1.2. It shows that out of the sample of women workers all of them were Hindus. Out of which 54 Per cent belonged to general category. 46 Per cent were in the backward castes, viz, OBC. SC.



Source : Primary Data

7.3 -Marital Status

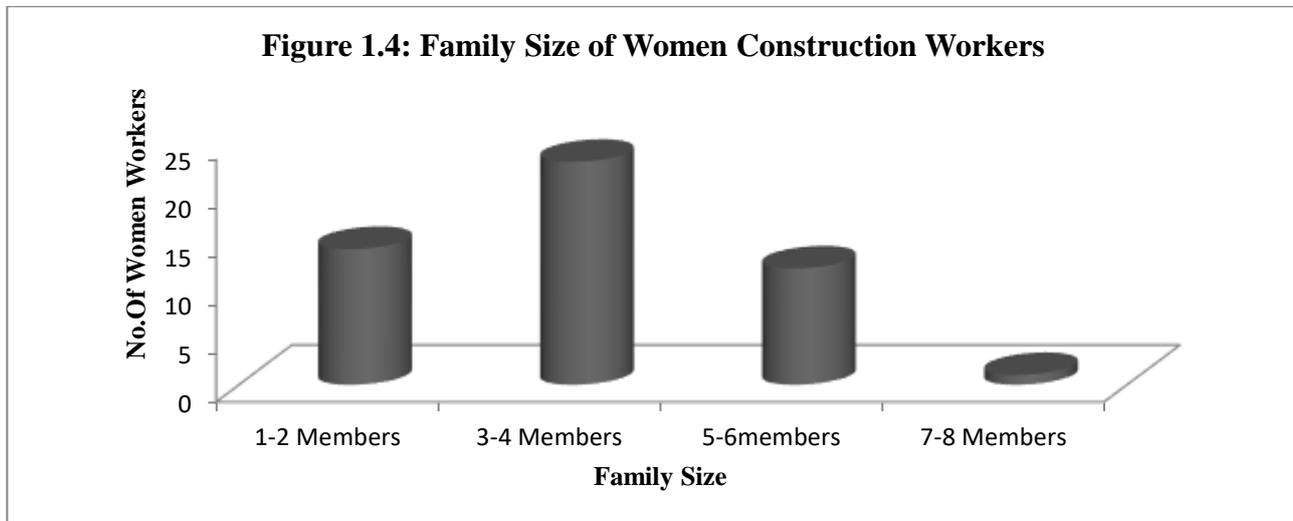
The concept of marital status applies to the conjugal arrangements of a person. Marital status is also a social indicator for understanding the socio-economic status of women. It changes the women’s role and increases their duties and work load. The sample consisted of married, single, widowed and divorcees. Most of them were married, that is 68 Per cent women workers were married, 22 Per cent were widows. 8 Per cent were unmarried and remaining 2Per cent were divorcees.



Source : Primary Data

7.4 -Family Size

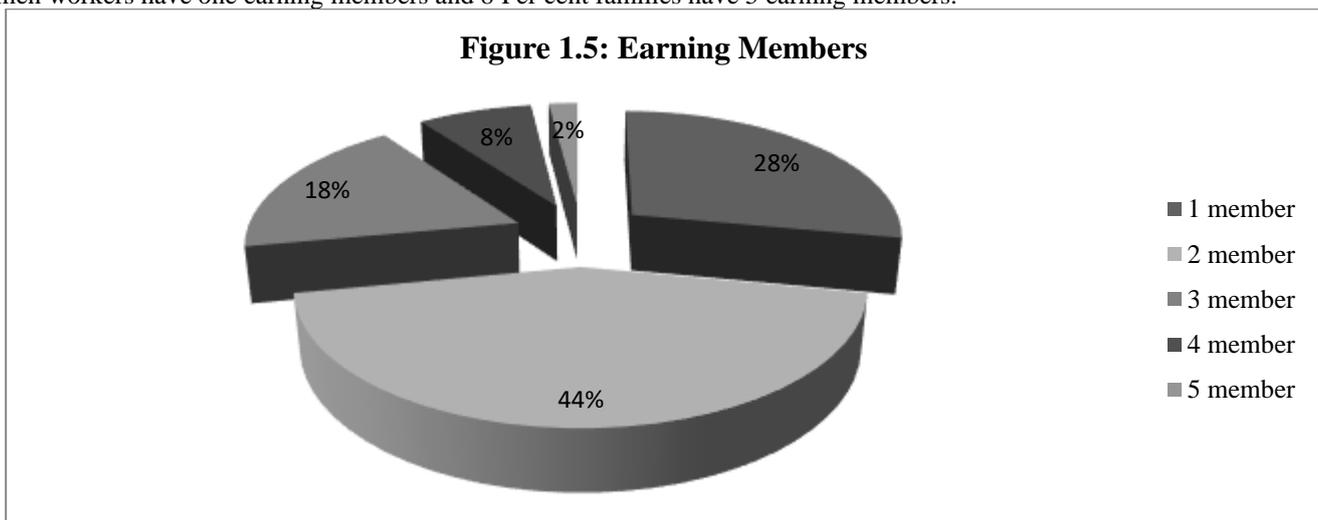
Family is the basic and universal social structure. The women construction workers can be classified as per their size of the family, an effort has been made to determine the family size. It refers to whether there is small or joint family system and number of family members in the sample of women construction workers.



Source : Primary Data

7.5 - Women Workers With Regard to the Earning Members of Their Families

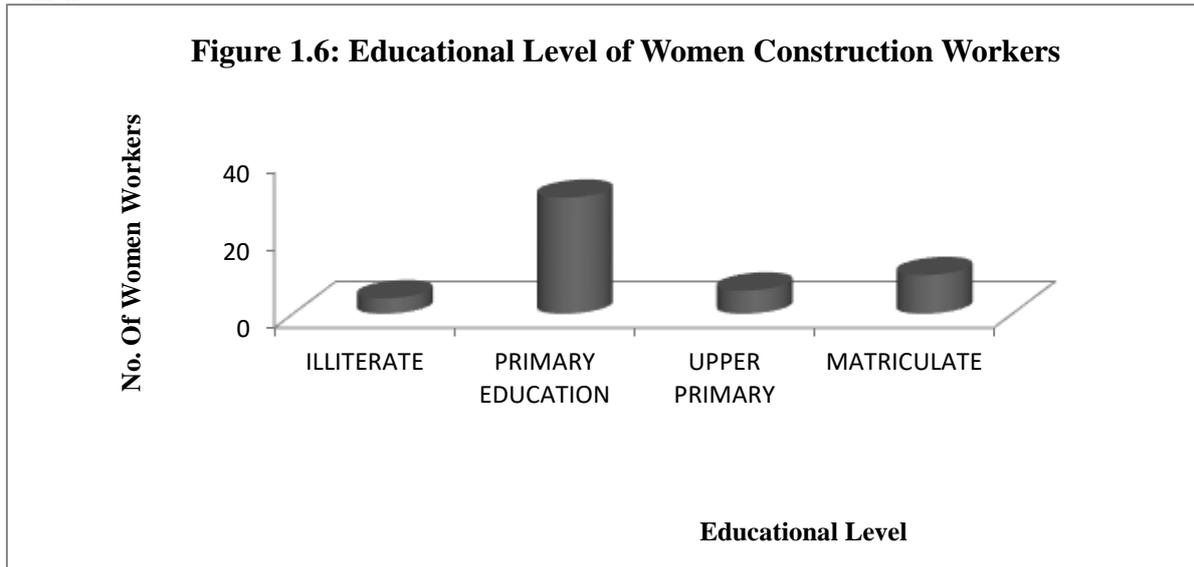
The number of earning members in a family shows the economic soundness of that family. Out of sampled women construction workers 44 Per cent and 18 Per cent families there are 2 and 3 working members respectively per family. 28 Per cent of families of women workers have one earning members and 8 Per cent families have 5 earning members.



Source : Primary Data

7.6 - Distribution of Women Workers According To Their Education

Education plays a key role in the development of an individual. Education to some extent compensates the effects of poverty. It is one of the major degrees to measure the social status of any community. Generally, the level of education is the indicator of social status of women.

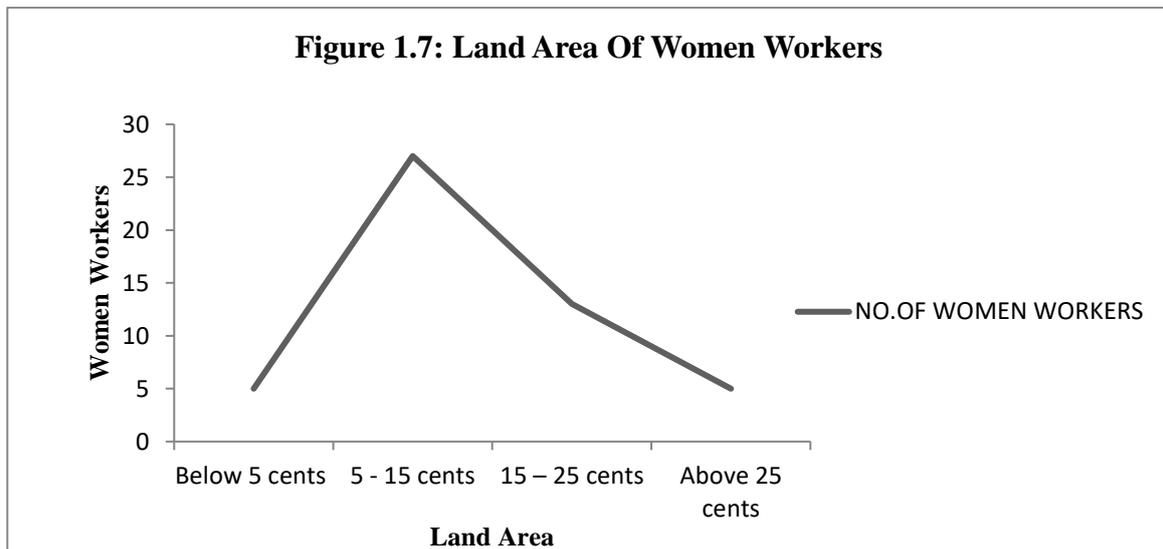


Source : Primary Data

Out of the sample of the study area 8 Per cent of the women workers are engaged in the construction works under the category of illiterate. Only 20 Per cent of the women workers are matriculate. 60 Per cent women construction workers have only primary education and the remaining 12 Per cent have studied up to upper primary level.

7.7- Land holdings of Women Workers

Land is an important natural resource. Most of the women workers hold meagre areas of land. The pattern of land holding not only influences the economic status of women workers but also their social status.



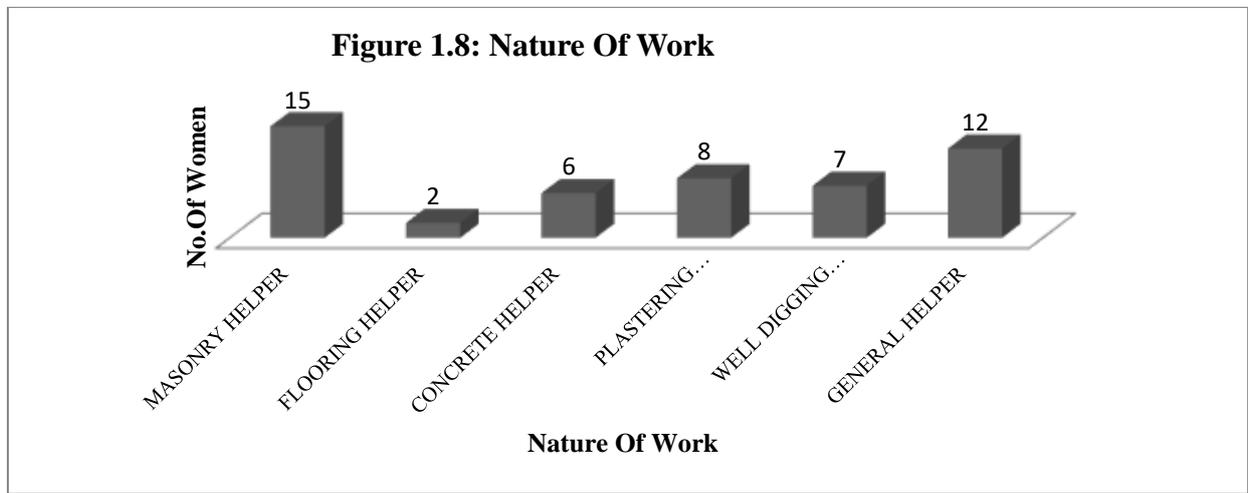
Source : Primary Data

Out of the samples, All respondents possessed own land. The 54 Per cent occupied 5 to 15 cents of land. Only 10 Per cent possess below 5 cents and the remaining 36 Per cent can hold land area of 15 or above 15 to 25 cents.

7.8 -Occupational Status

Occupation is considered as the main source of income and it represents the economic status of people. The women workers in the construction sector are always employed as helpers of skilled men workers. Women workers were doing the job of supplying bricks and sand, mixing raw materials, watering the construction, pointing the floor, and other miscellaneous work. On the basis of nature of work they are categorized as masonry helpers, flooring helpers, plastering helpers, concrete helpers, well digging helpers and general helpers.

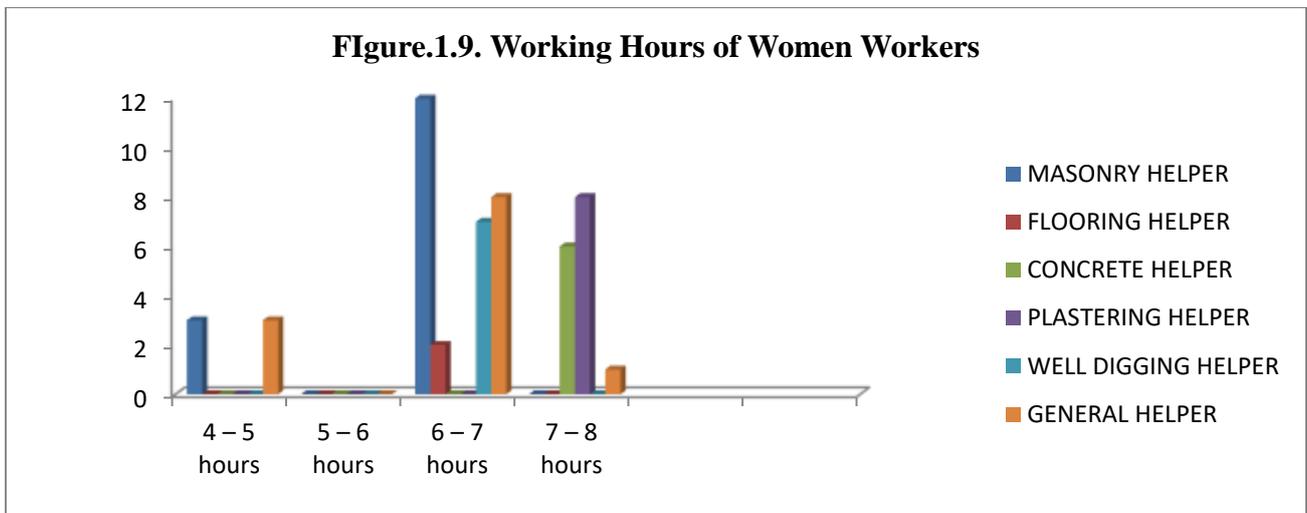
The data reveal that out of the sample, 30 percent of respondents are working as masonry helpers. 24 Per cent women workers were engaged as General helpers. 12 Per cent were concrete helpers, 16 Per cent were employed as plastering helpers, and 14 Per cent women were engaged in well digging work as helpers. Only 4 Per cent were engaged in flooring work.



Source : Primary Data

7.9 -Women Workers According To Working Hours

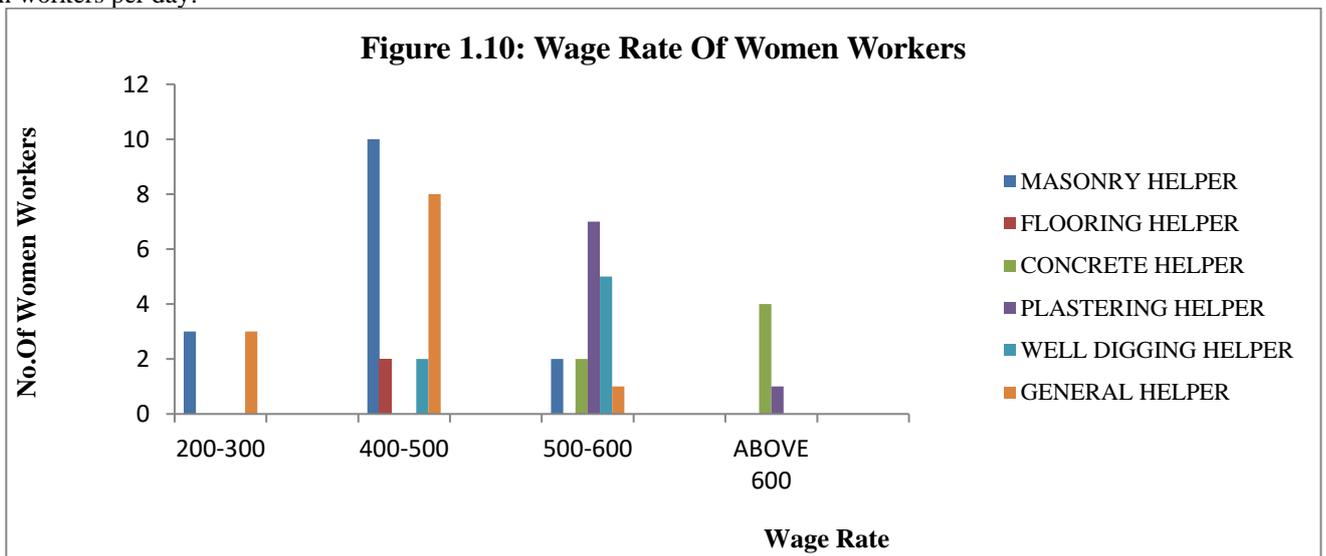
Construction sector is in unorganized nature so they have no fixed working hours. Working hour influences the working condition of women workers. For getting a specific picture of their workload it is necessary to classify them according to their working hours per day. The Figure 1.9 shows that Most of the women workers in the construction sector are working more than 5 hours in a day. Out of the sample the majority of the concrete helpers and plastering helpers were working for 7-8 hours daily. While masonry helpers, well digging helpers, flooring helpers and other general helpers in the construction field were working 6-7 hours per day.



Source : Primary Data

7.10 -Wage Structure

Wage structure also influences the working and living condition of women workers. So this study identifies the wages earned by women workers per day.



Source : Primary Data

The Figure 1.10 depicts the classification of women workers according to their wage rate. The wage rate of women workers were varied between Rs.200 and above Rs.600 respective of the type of their work. The women workers, who were employed as helpers of men in the construction field, 34 Per cent of women workers received wage between Rs.500 and Rs.600 and above Rs.600. Majority of the women workers that is 44 Per cent get wages between Rs. 400 – 500. Only 12 Per cent women workers in the construction received wage between Rs.200 – 300.

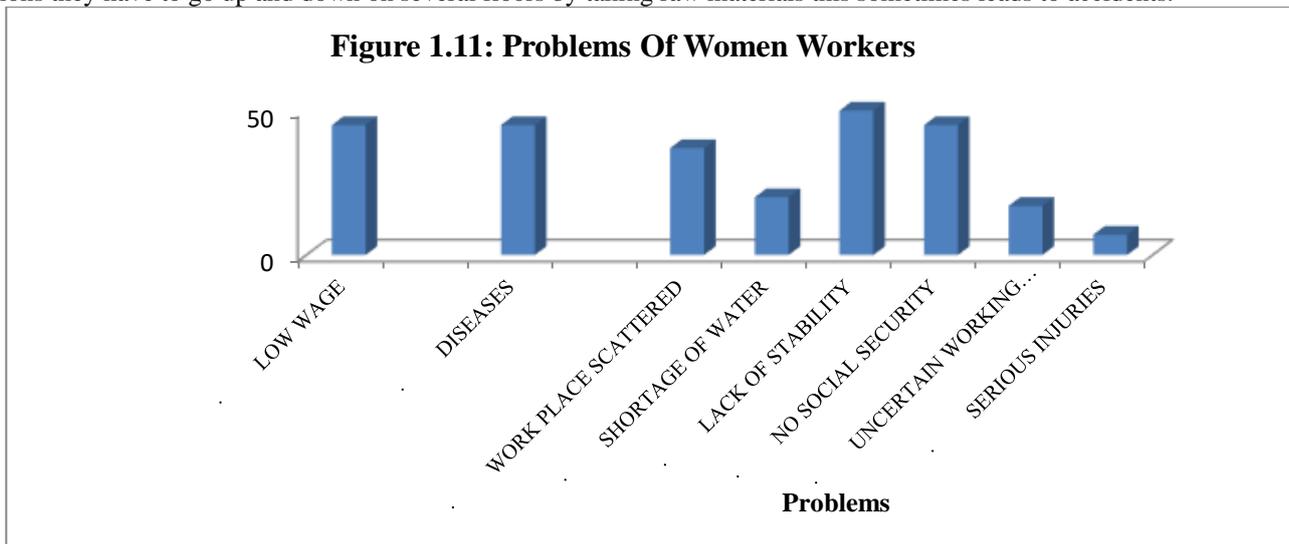
7.11- Karl Pearson’s Coefficient of Correlation

In this study it is used to calculate the degree of relationship between working hours and wage rate of women working in the construction sector. The value of r shows there is high degree of correlation between working hours and wage rate.

$$r = 0.928061$$

7.12 - Problem Faced By the Women Workers

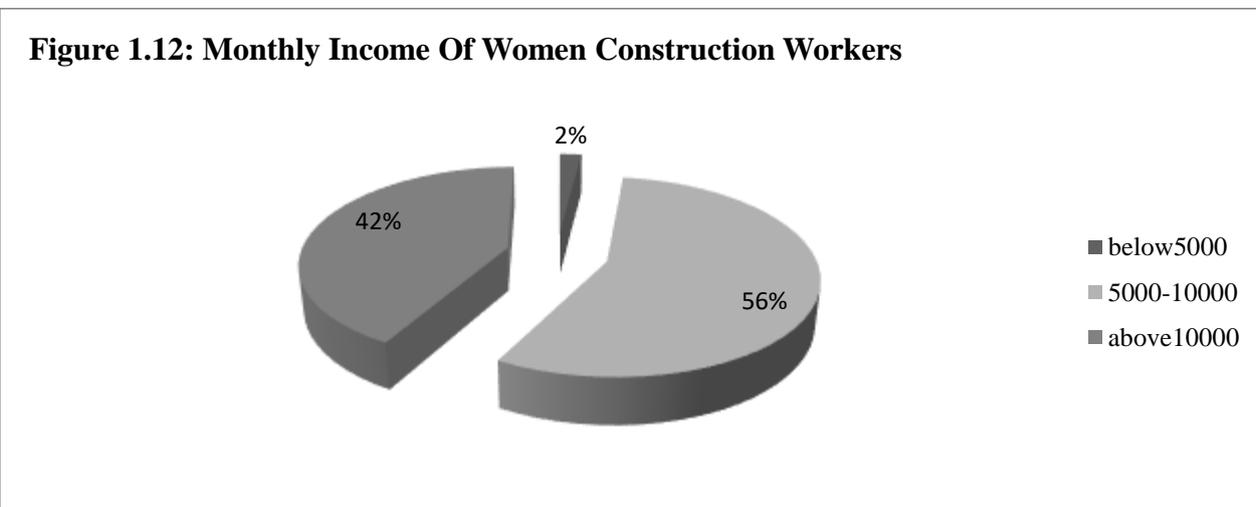
The study also focused on the working conditions of women workers with a view to make an attempt to analyze the problems faced by women workers in the construction sector. The main problem is lack of stability, 100 Per cent women workers face this problem. The nature of work in the construction field is casual and uncertain. Among construction labours low wages, occupational diseases, no social security were other problems faced by them, that is 90 Per cent of them face this problems. It was also found that 74 Per cent of women workers face the problem of workplace changes. Also weather conditions such as shortage of water affect 40 Per cent of women construction workers. 14 Per cent of women workers also face the problem of serious injuries; they work in difficult conditions they have to go up and down on several floors by taking raw materials this sometimes leads to accidents.



Source : Primary Data

7.12- Monthly Income of the Women Workers

Income is one of the important factor which determines the economic condition of women workers. it comes to our notice that the monthly income of 56 Per cent of the sampled women workers attached to the construction sector under this study lies between Rs. 5000 to Rs. 10000. Only 42 Per cent of women workers earn monthly income above Rs. 10000. Out of 50 samples only 2 Per cent women construction workers can get monthly an income below Rs. 5000.



Source : Primary Data

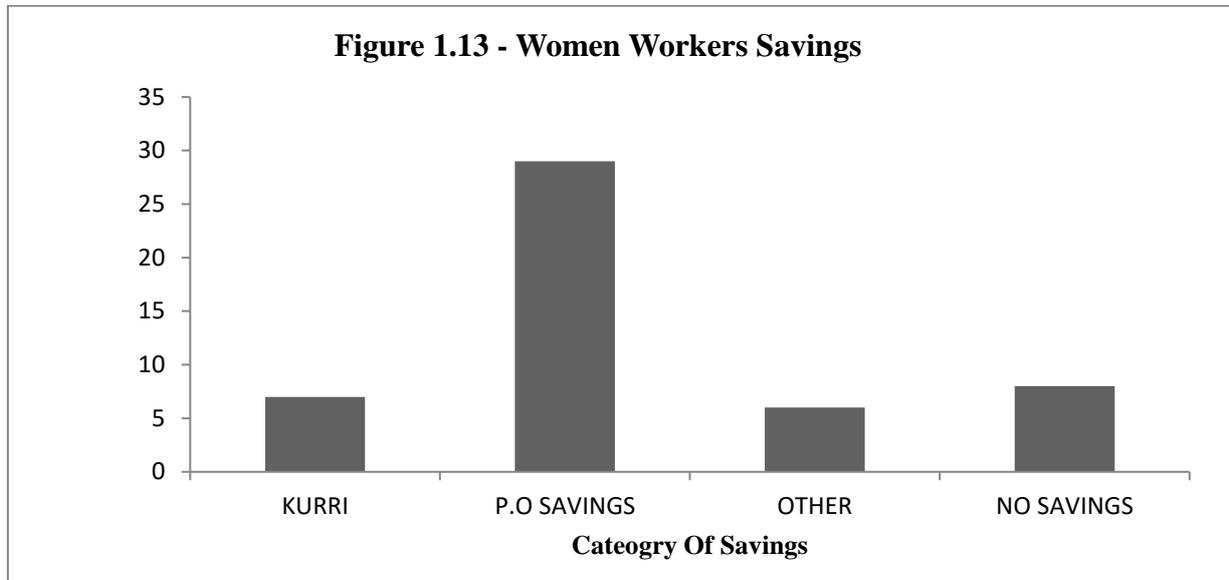
7.14 -Monthly Expenses of the Family

The major expenses of a family include expenses on food, medical expenses, repayment loans, education, transportation, clothing and payment for utilities available etc. out of the sample major portion their income spend on food items. Most of the women respondents need their income for the subsistence or welfare of the family. In This study women construction workers spend

their major portion of income for medical treatment. In some cases, their income had helped in repayment of loans, education of their children, payment of utilities like electricity bill, cable bill, Gas bill etc. The women workers spend their entire income for the needs of the family rather than for their own needs and desires.

7.15-Savings of the Women Workers

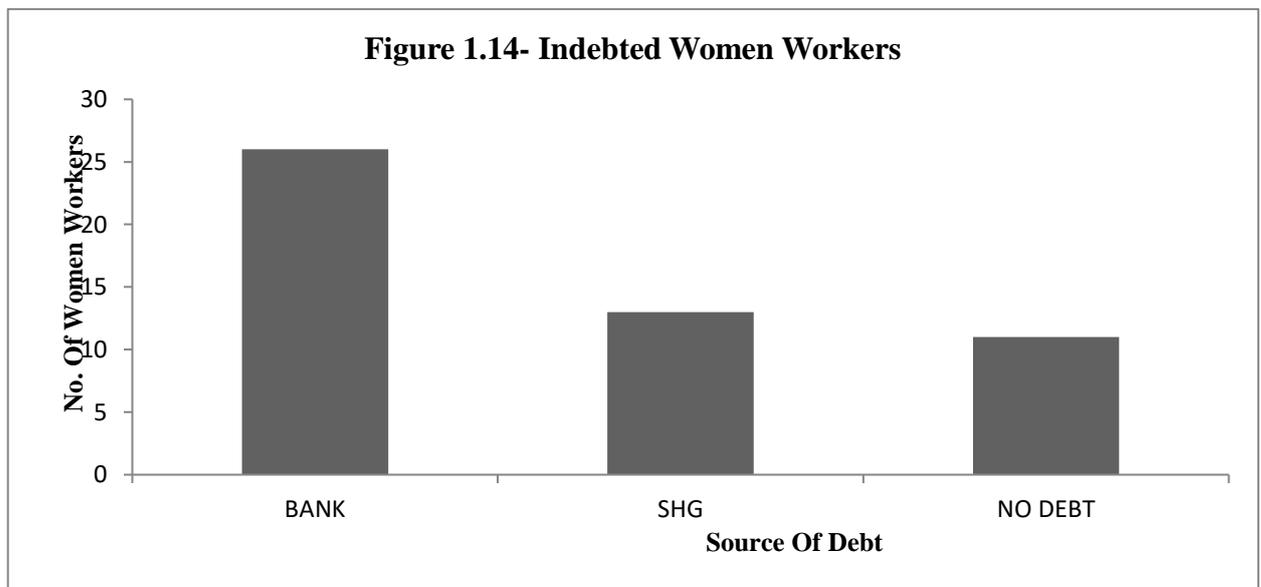
Savings is also one of the important factor determines the economic conditions of a person. The source of savings of the women workers are categorized in Figure 1.13. It was clear that 58 Per cent of women workers had monthly savings in post office. 14 Per cent of women construction workers had savings in Kurri under self-help groups. Only 12 Per cent women workers save their money in other source like banks. But out of the sample 16 Per cent women workers not saved in any form.



Source : Primary Data

7.16 -Indebted Women Construction Workers

The women workers had credit under their own risk. The debt burden of women workers also influences their economic condition. The study clearly indicates that 52 Per cent of the women workers are indebted to Bank. 26 Per cent of the women working in the construction sector are indebted to self-help group (SHG). A meagre Per cent of women workers are not indebted to any institution or to any other source. The main reason for indebtedness of women workers is for house construction, repairing, marriage purpose etc.



8. SUGGESTIONS

1. It is suggested that Government should make efforts to improve the working conditions of women construction workers in terms of occupational safety, working hours, payment of adequate wages to them. So that the working conditions of women workers engaged in construction sector of employment may have mandatory decent and dignified work.
2. It is suggested that provide social security in the form of pension, insurance, and ESI (Employment State Insurance) etc.
3. It is suggested that every women try to deposit a small portion of their income as savings in banks, post offices because it is more beneficial than other sources.
4. It is suggested that awareness may be create among women construction workers on opening bank account for saving money.
5. It is suggested to provide separate resting sheds to women workers with minimum basis facilities in the work place.

6. Some women workers are not taking loans because of higher interest rates and also the banks are not giving loans due to lack of collateral securities. So, it is suggested that government can start a special scheme for giving loans with low rate of interest only by seeing their identity card or Aadhar cards without any other security.
7. It is suggested that equal pay for equal work should be adopted.
8. It is suggested that all construction women workers are organized through labour unions, and for this speeded up their participation in 'Kerala NirmanaThozhilali' union and welfare board.
9. The nature of the construction activity is seasonal; hence workers were unemployed in off season. It is therefore essential to provide them a year-round employment.
10. Illiteracy is a major factor that affects women's socio-economic status and decision making power of women. So it is suggested that informal education classes should be extended for the illiterate with some incentives. Education will develop women's social prestige, self-confidence etc.
11. The women workers engaged in construction sector suffering some occupational diseases because the nature of work is such that, they working in mud, cement and sand. The chances of accidents are very higher if working at higher floors so it is suggested that providing medical insurance to women workers and their family.

9. CONCLUSION

Construction sector is an ongoing sector and is unorganized and unregulated form of work. In urban areas, many women workers engaged in the construction sector and support their family in income.

The importance of this study is that construction activity is one of the important need of human being. The economics of the construction sector indicates that this sector is very useful to urban and rural skilled and unskilled unemployed persons and breaks the vicious circle of poverty. The study was very important in the sense that it focused on women construction workers; they assist the bread earner of the family by adding to the family income or in some cases they are the bread earners.

The overall analysis of the study reveals that the socio-economic condition of women employed in construction sector activities are not satisfactory as compared with that engaged in formal sector. Also occupational status of women workers is not good. Most of the women workers were getting employment around 20 days in a month. Their working hours is not fixed. Their income is also low, it affect their living condition

10. REFERENCES

- [1] Dr. Vandana Dave, "Women Workers in Unorganized Sector", Women's link, 2012, July, Vol-18, NO-3, and P: 9-17.
- [2] Ghothoskar, "Status of India Women: Crisis and Conflict in Gender Issues, zed Books, 2003.
- [3] Rachael Kumar, "Development and Women's Work in Kerala-Interactions and Paradoxes, Economic and Political Weekly, 1994, December, P:17-24.
- [4] Sapru, sushma, "Socio-economic status of women problems and perspectives, Ashish publishing house, New Delhi, 1991.
- [5] <http://shodhganga.Inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/4376/7/07>
- [6] [http://www.lsidelhi.org.in/w1article/vandana 1803](http://www.lsidelhi.org.in/w1article/vandana%201803)
- [7] <http://www.cds.ac.in/krpcds/report/vimala.pdf>